



COMMISSION ON AGING

September 7, 2010

The Honorable George L. Leventhal, Chair
Health and Human Service Committee
Montgomery County Council
101 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Mr. Leventhal,

The Commission on Aging (COA) is pleased to respond to your request for our participation in the Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee work session on September 23. Unfortunately I am unable to participate in this meeting since it conflicts with the monthly Commission meeting. However, I have asked Alan Kreger, the Vice-Chair of the Commission, to represent us.

The Commission cannot stress enough how imperative it is that the HHS Committee view the overall needs of older adults and the cumulative effect of program reductions rather than focusing on individual programs. To that end the Commission has identified three groups whom we believe need support from the County. Our first concern is the vulnerable, at-risk senior who depends on a variety of services provided through the Department of Health and Human Services. We want to be assured that seniors who are referred to Adult Protective Services be provided with the continuum of services that is a necessary element of the care program designed to meet their needs. These services include in-home care, nutrition, case management, long term care ombudsman services, mental health services, specialized senior housing, and other wrap-around services.

Between FY07 and FY10, the number of investigations completed by the APS staff has increased by 22.6% (from 385 to 472 investigations). In FY09, 69% of APS referrals were for seniors 65 years and older. In FY10, the number of referrals increased to 72%, a significant upward trend. This is our most vulnerable population in the County, and the COA believes that we have a responsibility to ensure their safety.

The second group of older persons who concern us are low income seniors who live alone. More than twenty-five percent of County seniors age 65 and older live alone, and this percentage increases as they age. An estimated 18 percent of seniors have a limitation in performing activities of daily living. Racial/Ethnic groups have higher levels of poverty than white, non-Hispanic groups. These groups of seniors are most likely to be adversely impacted by the severe program cuts made as a result of the County's economic crisis. The services frequently needed by this population include case management, transportation, in-home assistance, chore services, dental services, congregate and home delivered meals, and income

assistance, including food stamps. Furthermore, respite care is often needed in those situations where the senior lives with a caregiver.

The COA also wishes to call to your attention to the needs of middle-income older adults. While less vulnerable, they have been adversely affected by the considerable program cuts that were made in the past year. A significant number of persons in this group are women living alone, who are often aging in place and at great risk of social isolation and its attendant consequences. Transportation and mobility are vital to successful aging. Yet this population has experienced reduced services in recreational programming, transportation and library access. Social and recreational programs, which often include preventive health services, reduce the isolation of this segment of the population, help them maintain optimal cognitive and mental health, and reduce the possibility of costly institutionalization. Furthermore, in a time of high unemployment, older adults who are often trying to supplement incomes with jobs have had their transportation costs affected by loss of free Ride-On service during commuting hours.

Finally, we want to emphasize that older adults are a large and rapidly growing segment of the County's population. A continued decline in providing services will exacerbate the problems older adults currently face. Furthermore, lack of attention to preventive services will in the long run be more expensive to the County if they are not acknowledged and addressed at this time. The cost of not supporting older adults will only increase dramatically as the population ages. Therefore, we urge the HHS Committee to look at the overall needs of both vulnerable and vital seniors and to maintain and even strengthen services to this important group of individuals.

Sincerely,

Elaine Kotell Binder
Chair, Commission on Aging